AACC Member Survey Results: FAFSA Completion

In August 2015, Presidents and CEOs of 41 American Association of Community College (AACC) member institutions were selected for a survey on a variety of student financial aid related issues, including the completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) of their students. The institutions selected for the sample consisted of institutions that are likely to respond (active participants in a variety of AACC bodies, including the Board of Directors) and reasonably representative of AACC membership. Based on relevant criteria, such as sector, geographic location, and size, the 30 institutions that actually responded can be considered to be reasonably, albeit not in a statistical sense, representative of AACC members and community colleges generally.

Survey Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Satisfaction that Pell Grant Eligible Students</th>
<th>N=30</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are Completing FAFSA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfied</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Satisfied</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral/Unsure</td>
<td>10%</td>
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A majority, but not a large one, of institutions reported being satisfied that Pell Grant eligible students are in fact completing the FAFSA.

The intensity of the degree of satisfaction is as follows:

1 out 10 indicated not being satisfied at all and 3 out of 17 reported being very satisfied.
The reasons why students are not completing the FAFSA are presented in order of the percent of institutions agreeing that this is a reason for FAFSA non-completion.

- The highest percent of institutions reported that the reason for FAFSA non-completion is that students are unaware that it is necessary to complete the FAFSA to obtain grants as well as apply for loans.
- The reason reported by the next highest percent of institutions was immigration related issues, such as being afraid that the information will be used against the FAFSA filer to deport or otherwise negatively impact the student’s status.
- Two-thirds of the institutions reported that FAFSA non-completion is due to it being too complicated or parents’ unwillingness to provide requisite information to complete the FAFSA.
According to the comments, institutions overwhelmingly reach out to high schools to increase FAFSA completion, including organized activities, such as:

- **High school events**
  - Financial aid workshops
  - Presentations
  - State FAFSA Program High school night
  - College Goal Sunday
  - Advertise in high schools
  - Partner with school districts and high schools about FAFSA and financial literacy and aid at college orientation and other sessions

- **Events at community colleges**
  - FAFSA Lab where parents and students and other community members can come for assistance
  - Welcome Center
  - FAFSA help nights and Financial Aid Day hosted on community college campus
  - Email reminders to enrolled students, links to federal tax records
  - Extended evening and weekend hours for financial aid counseling
  - FAFSA Friday – students can walk in for assistance
  - Installation of financial aid hotline (under consideration)
  - Language translation assistance
  - Encourage FAFSA completion at time of admissions/registration

### Percent Disagreeing or Neither Agreeing Nor Disagreeing with Reasons for FAFSA Non-Completion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Disagreeing</th>
<th>Neither Agreeing Nor Disagreeing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Issues Prohibit Completion</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration Related Issues</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verification Process Inhibits Completion</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAFSA Form Too Complicated</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents Unwilling To Provide Information</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unaware FAFSA Completion Necessary</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unaware of Grant Eligibility</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• Other events
  o Church visits
  o Community center visits
  o Club meetings

• Other activities
  o Apply for TRIO program grants
  o Sending out postcards to students and parents
  o Information on financial aid and support is also highly publicized on our webpages for students
  o Use social media

Nearly all the respondents (N=26) commented that the actions taken by their institutions to increase the number of students who completed FAFSA have increased over time, in terms of the number of activities and their frequency.

About one-third of the institutions reported that their efforts to increase FAFSA completion have been effective in increasing FAFSA completion. While another third reported that FAFSA completion is mostly related to enrollment so as enrollment goes up so does FAFSA completion and the reverse when enrollment goes down. The others reported that the efforts either had no effect or it was too soon to say.

Resources to conduct extra activities is an issue for most of the respondents. Therefore, a question was asked “if resources were no object, what else might your institution do to enhance FAFSA completion?,” to which most (N=26) responded.

The responses to this could be grouped into several major categories:

1. Increase staff to be involved in various activities, such as high school events and other outreach as well as one-on-one activities; e.g., mobile FAFSA lab or unit; increase hours; more folks calling, emailing, holding workshops, orientation sessions, one-on-one counseling
2. Contact individual students who have applied to the school;
3. Increase the number and frequency of outreach events, including outreach to high schools and the community; e.g., set up communication tables in the community, at Walmart and offer assistance similar to ISAC Corp.
4. Offer financial incentives; e.g., offer door prizes, food, free childcare during workshops and other activities; pay for FAFSA application completion; more in scholarship money
5. Expand TRIO and ED support programs
6. Use technology; we would like to invest in technological solutions